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TOGA SPORTS

OCTOBER - DECEMBER 2013

STAND UP & PADDLE!

- TOUGH MUDDER LIVES UP TO ITS REP
- APPS FOR A BETTER HEALTH
- NATURE'S PATHS TO WELLNESS: MARPI & BEACH ROAD PATHWAY

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Why would anyone travel halfway across the globe to participate in an activity that will have you racing across a baking desert, plunging into frigid waters, climbing 10-foot walls of rough timber, and crawling through mud pools strung with live wires that will shock you with 10,000 volts of electric shock? Yeah, for ordinary folks like us I'd say insanity, but for four intrepid souls from the CNMI, it was the challenge of a lifetime, a chance to beat one's chest, roar, and earn one of arguably the most coveted headbands in the world: the orange Tough Mudder headband. Calling themselves the Hoopaholics, the team managed to beat one of the most challenging and grueling obstacle courses in the world and came away from the experience with an incredible story to tell in this month's edition of TAGA *Sports*. ***Read story on Page 10***

Another CNMI fixture, Brad Ruszala, shares with Mark Rabago his experience with the Cobra Ironman triathlon that was recently held in Cebu, Philippines, and how he transitioned from a deskbound reporter to being a regular in the triathlon circuit in the CNMI. In between, he managed to marry a beautiful woman, Kathy, and have two adorable children with her. ***See Page 8***

Want to learn a new watersport? Roselyn Monroyo's feature on standup paddling should give you enough pointers on how to get you started on this unique activity. Who knew that you could do so much more with a surfboard than just plain ol' surfing? ***See story on Page 20***

This quarter's edition of TAGA *Sports* is not just about the Commonwealth's athletes or things athletic, though. We also take a look at two of the most common spots on Saipan that are popular with athletes and exercise-goers alike: The Beach Road Pathway and Marpi. Both are undeniably postcard pretty, each has its own unique attractions, and both have become the go-to place for people who want sweat it out while taking in the stunning views. Beats running on a treadmill in front of a flatscreen TV. ***See stories on Pages 16 and 18***

Also, find out what's the latest with former Saipan standout athlete Faheem Ebrahim, how Abner Venus got started with organizing basketball tournaments, and how Noriko Togawa, the doyenne of the CNMI golfing scene, became the winningest female golfer in the Tournament of Champions.

I hope you'll enjoy reading this latest edition of TAGA *Sports*. Email me at editor@saipantribune.com for comments, suggestions, and violent reactions. I mean it.

JAYVEE VALLEJERA
Editor

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COVER ART
Ponce Rasa of SUP SPN shows how to do standup paddling.

Photography by
ROSELYN MONROYO

TAGA SPORTS

VOLUME 3 NO. 13
OCTOBER - DECEMBER 2013

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TAGA *Sports* is printed in Hong Kong.

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TAGA *Sports*
is published quarterly by the
Saipan Tribune Inc.
with offices on the
2nd Floor, JP Center, Beach Road,
Garapan, Saipan
To inquire about ad rates or to place an
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28 Faheem Ebrahim takes it slow but pines for his winning ways on Saipan. MARK RABAGO

WRITERS' BLOC

ROSELYN B. MONROYO
Writing about the Hoopaholics' "Desert Dare" brought back childhood memories for Roselyn. She did not crawl on mud or climb over a fence, but she had her share of "dares" during town fiestas back home. She scrambled with the boys in picking up a greased coconut and fished for coins in a basin full of murky water using her mouth.

HAIDEE V. EUGENIO
Haidee once lived in an apartment fronting portions of Saipan's Beach Road and that was about the only time she would walk on the pathway on her free afternoons, usually with camera in hand for the flaming sunsets. Working on the piece about the pathway, which has become one of Saipan's enduring landmarks, has rekindled her interest in using the pathway again.

MARK RABAGO
Mark first met Abner Venus when he covered the 2001 Inter-Government Basketball League between DPS and DCCA. Venus was one of the organizers of that league. Mark also covered Faheem Ebrahim during his short but dominating stint in the island's tennis scene from 2002 to 2006. Brad Ruszala, meanwhile, was a sports reporter for *Saipan Tribune* and literally worked side-by-side with Mark at the paper's sports department.

Email letters to the editor to editor@saipantribune.com or mail to PMB 34, P.O. Box 10001, Saipan MP 96950. Submissions to TAGA *Sports* must include the writer's name, village address (no P.O. boxes), and daytime phone or mobile number. Letters may be edited for length and clarity and may be published or used in any medium. All submissions become the property of the publication and will not be returned.

Best running shoes? No fast answer

JANICE LLOYD
USA Today

If the return of cooler weather across the nation motivates you to begin running or to pick up where you left off, your first step might be to invest in new shoes.The choice now can be bewildering with all the lightweight, flexible shoes flooding the stores and posing a stark contrast to the traditional, heavily cushioned, rigid ones.

Running shoes fuel annual sales of more than $5 billion. A good pair costs you $100 to $140 whether stiff or flexible. Take your time deciding, medical experts and researchers say, or you could be dealing with an injury that becomes chronic or takes months to heal.

The new generation of lighter shoes has minimal cushioning across the bottom. The shoes are flexible front to back and side to side and have lower heels. Their design springs from the barefoot running craze and is based on a technology for runners who are midsole or forefoot strikers, meaning they strike first with that part of their foot. This style of running became trendy after Christopher McDougall's wildly popular 2009 book, Born to Run, about Tarahumara Indians who run 150-miles plus at a time in Mexican canyons, where they live, with only the lightest of support on their feet. McDougall, who had many injuries as a "shod" runner, embraced barefoot running.

Traditional shoes are mostly for heel-to-toe strikers, dating back to the early 1970s when the first waffles started appearing on the bottom. Gradually more and more cushioning and support were added, first under the heel and then into the mid and front part of the shoe to protect the foot from impact. They developed along with the jogging craze.

"There are people who are really pushing the minimalist shoe," says Steve Messier, director of the Wake Forest University Runners' Clinic. "But anyone who starts to talk about this shoe is better than that shoe is speculating. The point is we don't really know yet which kind of shoe is better. There's not enough science yet to support it."

Research published in the journal Nature in 2010 found people who run barefoot produce fewer pounds of force when their feet hit the ground compared with shod runners. Lead researcher Daniel Lieberman, professor

of human evolutionary biology at Harvard in Cambridge, Mass., wrote "forefootand midfoot gaits were probably more common when humans ran barefoot or in minimal shoes, and may protect the feet and lower limbs from impact-related injuries experienced by a high percentage of runners."

The main goal of any runner, Messier says, is to stay injury free.

"They love running and don't want to have to stop," he says. "We hear about it when they do have to stop for any reason. Nothing else can replace their running, they tell us. We understand them."

When it comes to buying new shoes he says, "the first question I ask people is why switch to a different style? Is it because it's trendy? If it's not broken why fix it? We're confident running improves quality of life and we like to see people run into their 80s or 90s."

Irene Davis says she is confident barefoot running strengthens your feet and improves your running. Nicknamed the "Barefoot Running Professor," she is director of the Spaulding National Running Center at Harvard.

She notes about 80% of runners get injured in any year. "So it's not like (traditional) shoes are really preventing injuries," she says.

The key problem with traditional shoes, she says, is a cushioned heel promotes a rear foot strike that is associated with greater impact loads. It also stiffens the leg, she says, and doesn't allow the leg to better support the body's weight. This stiffness is possibly what has led to some of the most common runner injuries (shin, knee and hip problems).

Running barefoot or in a minimalist shoe strengthens the foot and allows it to carry load, she says, but adds "you need to take it slow when you're getting started."

When forefoot striking, runners switch to run a shorter stride (take a long stride and you'll land on your heel; that hurts when barefoot or in a minimal shoe.) She says they retrain people at the running center how to stride when making the transition.

How to tell if a shoe is designed for fore foot striking? She says if you can't easily twist and bend the shoe than it is too stiff.

But pay attention. Here's where the debate continues. Naomi Shields, an orthopedic surgeon and spokesperson for the American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons, says if she can take a shoe and twist the toe back to the heel, then it does not have enough support.

"I can tell you I've been seeing so much tendinitis and stress fractures in feet that have taken people out of running because they're wearing these lightweight shoes," she says."It used to be flip-flops sending people to me, now it's these."

But serious runners might have other reasons to switch: They want to pick up speed and think the shorter stride and lighter shoes help. Is that necessary for weekend warriors?

Shields says if people run or jog 8- to- 11 minute miles, then more than likely they're heel-to-toe runners and need a supportive shoe. "You're not going to pick up much speed if you were to switch anyway," she says.

Messier says unless you're an elite male athlete (2 hours, 30 minute marathon) or elite female athlete (2 hours, 50 minute marathon), why rush to change?

"My recommendation would be to wait until the research is out," Messier says. "The important thing is you're able to run for the rest of your life. Running improves so many parts of your life from a physical standpoint to an emotional standpoint."

Davis,who runs barefoot about 12 miles total a week because "it's the most natural way to run," says if you're starting out barefoot or wearing a minimalist shoe take it slowly.

"We've deconditioned our feet in cushioned shoes," Davis says. "They move us away from moving the way we're supposed to run. We can recondition our feet."

But slow and easy, she warns. "My recommendation the first time is three minutes. And then build up to running longer. We have to be careful until we have more data, but we're working on finishing some new research now."

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Smartphone apps for health & fitness

KARA YORIO
The Record (Hackensack, N.J.)

Going for a run, losing a few pounds or finally exorcising a bad habit? Of course, there are apps for all of that and more, and more people are filling their smartphones with them.

Nearly 20 percent of smartphone owners have at least one health app on their device, according to a Pew Research Center study released in late 2012, with exercise, diet and weight the most popular kind. The study found that women—those younger than 50, better educated, and with an annual household income of more than $75,000—are more likely to have downloaded a health app.

There are plenty of choices (and seemingly more every day) for those women and anyone else who wants to add some health and fitness to their digital world.

Now is as good a time as any to download one or two. Here are some health and fitness apps that may help.

Juice

WHAT: Energy and activity tracker that helps you connect daily routine to energy level by keeping track of your activities such as sleep, diet, stress, mood and exercise to help you identify and change the energy-sucking behavior. Users get energy tips, a weekly report to track progress and help prioritizing healthy habits for the upcoming week.
HOW MUCH: Free
FOR: iPhone, iPod touch and iPad
DEVELOPER: Mindbloom

Fitsby

WHAT: This app plays off basic principles of human nature—money and social pressures motivate people. To get people to the gym, Fitsby has them challenge friends to a game of gym check-ins. Users can play for fun (and motivation) or for real money. A GPS system confirms user is at the gym and he must stay there for at least a half hour before checking out. At the end of the game, the winner(s) take the pot.
HOW MUCH: Free
FOR: Android, coming soon for iPhone, iPod touch and iPad
DEVELOPER: Fitsby

Lift

WHAT: This app lets you set goals for health, fitness and anything you want to improve. Want to read more, be kinder, drink more water, be more productive? There are more than 300,000 habits to choose from. Set the goal and get motivated by tracking habits, marking, monitoring and seeing progress and seeking social networking support if desired.
HOW MUCH: Free
FOR: iPhone, iPod Touch and iPad; coming soon for Android
DEVELOPER: Lift Worldwide Inc.

Cruise Control

WHAT:A unique option in a glut of running apps, Cruise Control matches music selections to the pace users want to run. There are four options—in Free Run, the app automatically selects music to match your running rhythm; Pace lets users pick a target speed and if they match their running rhythm to the music, it keeps them there; Heart Rate is much like Pace, if runner matches steps to the rhythm of the music, it will get the user to the targeted heart rate; and Cadence has users pick target stride rate and the app adjusts the songs to play at the same tempo.
HOW MUCH: $4.99
FOR: iPhone, iPod touch, iPad
DEVELOPER: Hyperion Industries

Azumio Fitness Trainer

WHAT:A big developer of health and fitness apps, Azumio added Fitness Trainer to its catalog in December. The app gives users more than 600 exercises and more than 100 home workouts—including seven body-part specific workouts—using only body weight, dumbbells or resistance bands. Sport specific workouts (for skiing or cycling, for example) are offered as in-app purchases.
HOW MUCH: $2.99
FOR: iPhone, iPod Touch, iPad
DEVELOPER: Azumio Inc.

NUTRITION APPS HELPFUL TOO…

BARBARA QUINN
The Monterey County Herald

I will not get my truck stuck in the mud this year. I will always have my cell phone with me. I will not begrudge having to walk a mile home if I do get my truck stuck in the mud and don't have my cell phone.

"I don't like New Year's resolutions," my friend told me as we waited for the AAA guy to get my truck out of the mud. Maybe because they are moving targets...we never know what life is going to toss our way.

Then on the radio this morning, I heard a man say we should change our thinking from what we want "to do" to what we want "to become." I like that.

For example, in my quest to "become" a few pounds lighter, I can choose to try some new foods. One on my list is "pasta zero plus"—a spaghetti product made with chickpeas (aka garbanzo beans) and "konjac" flour (a Japanese plant). One serving has one-eighth the calories of regular pasta. And most of the carbs in this product are in the form of soluble fiber—good for controlling blood sugars and cholesterol levels.

I can also choose to become healthier with some of these free apps for my smart phone. (Thanks to nutrition intern Marian Crockett for her research of these apps. Many are available for both iPhone and Android.)

SHOPWELL: Scans barcodes on food products to help me decide if a food is a good match for my personal dietary needs. Creates grocery lists and helps me avoid ingredients I don't want.

FOODUCATE: Scans barcodes to provide detailed nutritional content of food products.

FOOD ON THE TABLE. Helps me find healthy recipes within my diet restrictions and helps me create menus and grocery shopping lists. Also locates nearby grocery stores.

BIG OVEN. Plans meals and menus with over 250,000 recipes and gives me ideas on how to use leftovers.

LOSE IT! Helps me set up a calorie budget and tracks my calories, protein, carbs and fat each day. Also tracks daily exercise and helps me set goals.

MY FITNESS PAL. Measures my nutrient intake and physical activity each day and monitors my progress.

RUNTASTIC: Tracks every detail of more than 20 physical activities including time, speed, elevation and distance. Can be linked to My Fitness Pal.

PEDOMETER FREE GPS PLUS: Tracks my walking (or running) distance and pace and monitors my heart rate and calories burned. Even creates a map of my walking or running route.

INSTANT HEART RATE: Uses my smart phone camera lens to detect my heart rate from the pulse in my fingertips. Then shows it on a graph.

CARDIOBUDDY: Another free app that measures my heart rate with my smart phone.

GLUCOSE BUDDY: For people with diabetes; tracks glucose readings, carbohydrate intake, medication, and physical activity.

DIABETES LOG: Another free app for people with diabetes. Tracks blood sugar readings, food intake and medication use.

Tan Holdings

SPORTS CALENDAR

OCTOBER

MISO Girls Basketball and Boys Volleyball Leagues – These features teams from private and public high schools battling for varsity and junior varsity titles in indoor volleyball and basketball.

COPSSA Volleyball League – Private schools square off for the middle school and high school championships in co-ed indoor volleyball

M-League – The regular season of the M-League, the CNMI's premier competition in men's soccer, hits up this month as teams fight for the Division 1 and Division 2 fall titles.

NOVEMBER

NMIFA Fall Festival – Soccer teams in the U6, U8, and U10 age groups have a whole day of games and fun at the various school pitches to culminate the season

FA Challenge Cup – Outstanding teams in the U12, U15, and U18 age groups test each other's grit for the bragging rights for the fall season.

SSC All Schools Championships – Students from various elementary and high schools on Saipan troop to the Kan Pacific Swimming Pool to fight for age group championships and medals in relays and individual races.

Tan Holdings Tennis Classic –The fifth edition of this annual event brings together Guam and Saipan junior and adult players.

Turkey Trot Run – Runners on the island have to work out before having a feast on Thanksgiving Day, as they trek the 4.2-mile course up to Mt. Tapochao.

DECEMBER

Hell of Marianas – The annual 100-kilometer race around the island will have a new starting/finish line at the Mariana Resort and is now under Marianas Visitors Authority's calendar of events.

Traders Insurance Badminton Team Tournament – Northern Marianas Badminton Association's season-ending tournament will have its playoff round this month with five clubs hoping to end Saipan Badminton Club's two-year reign.

Christmas Island Relay – Runners race from San Antonio to the Last Command Post in this annual event.

This advertisement is sponsored by
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BRAD RUSZALA

from covering sports to competing in one

MARK RABAGO
TAGA *Sports* Associate Editor

Brad Ruszala got bit by the triathlon bug while covering the 2004 XTERRA Saipan Championship for the *Saipan Tribune*. He didn't compete that year but trained hard as heck and suited up for XTERRA Saipan the following year.

The 38-year-old IT&E marketing executive has gone on to compete in all the triathlon events in the CNMI, including XTERRA Saipan's partner in crime, the Tagaman Triathlon, the Rota Blue Triathlon, and the Tinian Triathlon.

On the side, Ruszala took part in almost all manner of sports on the islands, including the Saipan Marathon, Coffee Trail Run and various runs and cycling events. He also played for the CNMI Men's National Soccer Team and represented the CNMI in the Kaike Triathlon in Japan in 2005.

TAGA *Sports* recently caught up with the free-spirited Ruszala, who is a frequent contributor of the magazine, and was gracious enough to answer these 10 questions:

How was the experience competing in the Cobra triathlon like?

It was absolutely incredible. As soon as I landed in Manila, airport employees were asking me if I was competing in the Ironman and they helped me get my gear from place to place. The race was in Cebu and the people in Manila were as excited about the race as I was.

The pace quickened when I arrived in Cebu as all of Mactan Island and the surrounding areas were adorned with signs welcoming the visiting athletes. There were thousands of people lined up to see the race start and thousands of onlookers lined the street along the entire bike and run courses.

It was thrilling way to make my first visit to the Philippines!

BRAD RUSZALA

Brad Ruszala shows off his first Ironman 70.3 finisher's medal.

What made you take part in the race?

During the Tagaman awards banquet last March, Filipino professional triathlete Arland Macasieb challenged me to race with him in the Philippines. Traveling to an international event would be a great way to promote the Tagaman and it would be even better to represent the CNMI as an athlete.

Training for the race also provided the motivation for me to get back in shape. After my wife, Kathy, gave birth to our second child, I had pretty much let myself go, content to be a father who used to be an athlete. Training for this race empowered me with the focus and drive to be an athlete again.

How did you get into triathlon?

The first major sporting event I was tasked to cover with the *Saipan Tribune* was the 2004 XTERRA Saipan Championship. I was amazed by the amount of people who traveled around the world to push their bodies to their respective limits in extreme conditions. That year, Team Unlimited's Trey Garman offered me a slot in the race. I couldn't even swim! Later that year, I started swim training with Saipan Swim Club coach Michael Stewart, got my first mountain bike from Romey Lanuza at Saipan Bike Pro, and took up running to prepare for 2005.

What other sports do you enjoy aside from triathlon?

For many years I enjoyed playing soccer with the NMI Men's National Team, but now soccer has taken a back seat to multisport. My first love is still hockey. Every time I visit family and friends back home in Buffalo, New York I always find time to suit up and hit the ice.

What would you consider your biggest accomplishment in sports?

I'm pretty sure that my biggest sporting accomplishment is still ahead of me. In 2005, I came to within 4 kilometers of the finish line of the Kaike Triathlon. It took me 15 hours to get that far before my body quit on me. The main reason I'm still training is to return to Japan next summer for another crack at the only race I wasn't able to finish. I'll be able to answer this question when I cross that finish line in 2014.

How different is reporting sports from actually being or playing in one?

When I race, my focus is on myself. When I cover a race, my focus is on everyone else. Outside of that, both are fairly similar in that I have a goal in mind for each. When it

comes to racing, I continuously run through a mental checklist to keep me focused on my race plan. This usually consists of pace, in-race nutrition, and reminding myself to enjoy where I am and what I'm doing.

While covering races for the *Saipan Tribune*, I thought about what I wanted to write before the race happened. The story was going to be about the winner, the struggle, and the event as a whole so I tried to position myself to get the best photos to capture the spirit of whatever sport I covered.

One of my favorite sports stories was about Shoki Sakano's journey to the finish line during the 2005 Tagaman triathlon (http://www.saipantribune.com/newsstory.aspx?cat=2&newsID=46640).

What's your most memorable experience as a sports reporter?

Watching the CNMI baseball team beat Guam during the 2006 Micronesian Games. Thousands of spectators lined Francisco "Tan Ko" M. Palacios Field, standing six deep all the way around the fence, stood on vehicles, stood on buildings at Marianas High School, and on the dugouts to catch a glimpse of the gold medal game. The local crowd erupted when John Reyes fielded a grounder and turned a double play to end the game. I still get goose bumps when I think about the reaction of the fans.

Those Games meant so much to the people of Saipan who fought to host them after being told that we couldn't do it. Saipan hosted the top athletes from throughout Micronesia and did so with flying colors.

When did you come to Saipan and why did you settle on this little dot in the Pacific?

I came to the Marianas on Jan. 27, 2003. It's been almost 11 years since then but it feels more like a few months. I knew that I would be here for a long time as soon as that rush of hot, humid air hit me in the chest when I walked through the doors from Customs and took my first steps on Saipan.

The people I've met along the way have made all of the difference. I've always felt special here, like Saipan is where I was meant to live. The ocean, the weather, the food, the celebration of cultures, warm smiles on friendly faces; the islands delivered all of this and made me feel welcome from my first day.

What do you like most about the island?

I love all of our islands. While I live on Saipan, I am happy to say that I have forged friendships on Tinian and Rota. What I love the most about living here is that I feel like I can make a difference. More than anywhere else that I've lived, one person can make a world of difference in the Marianas. I'd like to think that I've done some things to make our home a better place to live.

- ☐ POWERADE Race 10/19
- ☐ PIC Road Race 11/10
- ☐ Rota Triathlon 11/16
- ☐ Hell of the Marianas 12/7
- ☐ Marianas Coffee Trail Race January 2014
- ☐ Bergerman Race January/February 2014 (NEW!)
- ☐ XTERRA Guam 3/29/2014
- ☐ XTERRA Saipan 4/5/2014
- ☐ Tagaman 4/12/2014
- ☐ Saipan Marathon 4/19/2014
- ☐ Tinian Turquoise Triathlon June 2014
- ☐ Kaike Triathlon July 2014

Future plans?

I love spending time with my family and I look forward to watching my kids grow into the wonderful people that I know they will become. I want to show them the world through their own eyes and experience culture that doesn't come from a book or a website.

As a race organizer and as an athlete, my race calendar is pretty full through next summer.

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Desert Bare

ROSELYN B. MONROYO
TAGA *Sports* Staff Writer

Imagine running in a desert against a stiff headwind, your face caked with dust and cracking from sand burn, your feet being alternately impaled by sharp rocks and cactus, and water and mud wearing you out while you're going up and down the terrain to complete the 10- to 12-mile course. That's not including the more than 20 obstacle courses you and your team have to go through to get to the finish line.

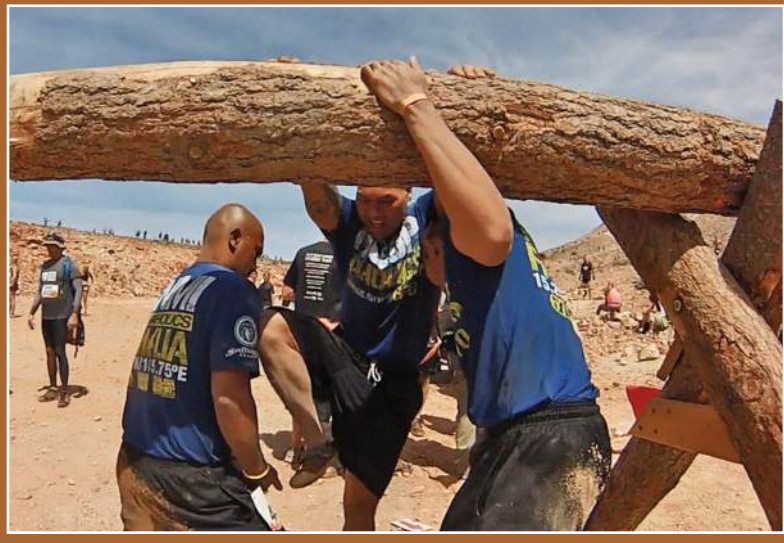
Sounds tough? It is.

Yet every year over a thousand participate in the Tough Mudder, consistently ranked in the Top 5 as one of the most challenging and grueling obstacle courses in the world.

Reading and hearing stories about the event don't do justice to this hardcore competition so after about six months of rigorous training, Jerry Diaz and James Lee packed their bags to meet up with Jessie Garcia and Richard Magcalas in Beatty, Nevada to try for themselves whether they have what it takes to conquer the Tough Mudder.

Calling themselves the Hoopaholics, the foursome began their excruciating journey by climbing the "Berlin Wall," a 10- to 12-foot tall wooden wall that would get participants to the starting loop. The group had no problem clearing their first obstacle, but others had, so Jessie and Richard helped bring down "stranded" climbers.

James, Jerry, Jessie, and Richard went through 23 other obstacles that certainly put them through the wringer but the Top 10 that left them badly bruised were the following:



10 ARTIC ENEMA

Frigid water in a desert in April? Impossible? Not!

A man-made pool (about 40 meters long and six feet deep) flooded with buckets of ice greeted the Hoopaholics foursome after racing through the desert for about 10 minutes. A wooden barrier at the center of the pool made it even harder and longer for Jerry and company to pass the hurdle. They had to swim under the barrier and when they reached the other end, Jessie had already sustained a cut (from the sharp edge of the ice) on his right hand, while the rest of the guys wobbled their way out of the tub with their knees still numb from their unexpected cold bath.

9 LUMBERJACKED

Sure, two "giant toothpick" (as described in the event's website) positioned six feet off the ground would not be hard to climb. But it's a different story when you are faced with this hurdle after using up all your upper body strength and hand grip from the monkey bar, climbing up a 40-plus-foot steep cliff while reaching for your teammates' hands and avoiding falling on sharp rocks, climbing two 10- to 12-foot walls, walking through muddy water, and crawling commando-style through soggy ground with barbed wire above your head.

8 WOUNDED WARRIOR

With seven obstacles down and long runs on up-and-down and dry-and-wet obstacles in between, fatigue began to take its toll, even for a personal trainer like Jessie. With both of his calves cramping, Jessie was fireman-carried by Jerry, James, and Richard for about one kilometer instead of alternating with his teammates in doing the obstacle that was named after the Wounded Warrior Project, one of the recipients of the funds raised in Tough Mudder.

7 LONG DANGLER

Crossing a nearly 70-foot slippery cable without getting soaked in another freezing pool is impossible as the cable sags in the middle, resulting in an unwanted dip in frigid waters. Richard did the next best thing, keeping himself from sinking deeper and longer by crossing both his legs on the cable and pulling his nearly 200-lb weight by hand to the other end. Other participants crawled slowly, worried about falling into the water and taking a stiffer penalty—staying in the icy cold pool for several minutes before finishing the obstacle.

6 UNDERWATER TUNNEL

More water, more pain for Jerry, who would rather run than swim. What made the punishment more difficult were the three floating barrels and the people simultaneously going under them to make it to the other end. Jerry said he couldn't fully extend his body to swim the nearly 100-meter-long makeshift pool with people swarming him and sometimes pulling his shirt and shorts to avoid drowning.

"Patience was key. I was the last one from our team to complete it," Jerry said.

5 TRENCH WARFARE

This obstacle is not for the claustrophobic, according to James. Move up and use your arms to crawl a bit faster and you'll hit your head. Stay too low and you won't see the splash of sand coming from the one ahead of you. James crawled out of the nearly 20-meter narrow and dark trench like a worm.

"When you're inside, all you can think of as you gasp for air is the other end of the line. Once you see the light you're relieved," James said.

4 DIRTY BALLERINA

Leaping over a 5-foot wide pit really requires the skills of a ballerina. Fall and you'll get covered with mud. You'll also need your teammates' help to pull you out from the 6-foot deep hole. James, Jessie, and Richard glided past the pits and waited for Jerry, who had difficulty leaping with his reconstructed left knee.

"One wrong landing or slip and I can get injured and that will be it for my teammates, too, with only one mile left in the course. Fortunately, with my teammates' encouragement and patience, I went through five pits safely," Jerry said.

3 MUD MILE

The name of the obstacle speaks for itself. Run, if you can, through waist-deep mud. James slipped when he jumped down the first pool. There are seven pools and you have to climb up mud-covered rocks to get to the next, with the mud giving you additional weight like quicksand. On top of that, the mud is icy cold, making your calves cramp. ➜

ELECTRIC EEL

Long lines started forming in this obstacle, as participants thought of the best way not to touch those long live wires hanging just a few inches away from the wet field. However, they can't. There is no way to avoid the jolt as you crawl your way out of the field. Richard placed both of his hands on his nearly bald head as if imagining how it will hurt to get smacked by as much as 10,000 volts of electric shock. He even had second thoughts of going through the obstacle, but ended up doing it anyway and said he passed out for a few seconds after his head touched a live wire.

Jerry was shocked several times and remembered his face slamming into the wet ground before his teammates pulled him out of trouble.

ELECTROSHOCK THERAPY

Talk about saving the best for last. This obstacle is the final and most daring test on the way to the finish line. Participants sprint through mud with more and longer live wires hanging. Unlike the electric eel, which is just a straight up crawl, this obstacle is made uneven with scattered hay bales and deep mud. Fall and you will still get shocked. James had multiple doses of electric shock, as his already worn out legs were smacked by the long wires, causing him to drop on the mud, not once but twice.

"It was very painful and even if you already crossed the obstacle, it felt like you're still getting shocked," said James, who along with his Hoopaholics buddies finished the course after nearly five hours.

SUPPORT GROUP

The prize for completing the course? An orange headband bearing the name of the event.

It may not be that much for others, but for Jerry, James, Richard, and Jessie, it's a big deal. The headband is the fruit of months of hard work, teamwork, discipline, and patience. It was something that brought the four and their support group (Jester Garcia, Stoney Villagomez, Billy Crisostomo, and Jayson Amado) closer.

"Without our support group, it would have been hard for us even just to go to Vegas. These friends gave as a place to stay, a car to ride, and food to nourish and keep us healthy and ready for the Tough Mudder. They were with us all throughout the course," said Lee, who lent his headband to his friends during a group photo after the event.

Lee also thanked the Tan Siu Lin Foundation, Docomo Pacific, and the families of Hoopaholics members for helping them raise funds for their trip to Las Vegas. TS

What can parents do to prevent baby bottle tooth decay?

Begin good oral hygiene at an early age. Here's how:

- Wipe the baby's gums with a clean gauze pad or washcloth after each feeding.
- Begin brushing your child's teeth, without toothpaste, when his or her first tooth comes in.
- Ask the dentist about fluoride, which helps lessen cavities.
- Schedule regular dental visits by your child's first birthday.

AND

- Never allow your child to fall asleep with a bottle containing anything but water.
- Never give your child a pacifier dipped in anything sweet.
- Reduce the sugar in your child's diet less, especially between meals.

Healthy primary (baby) teeth

Mild decay

Moderate decay

Severe decay

DIVISION OF PUBLIC HEALTH DENTAL CLINIC

This ad was funded by the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resource and Services Administration under Oral Health Workforce Activity Grant.

ABNER VENUS

sports organizer extraordinaire

MARK RABAGO
TAGA *Sports* Associate Editor

Abner Venus, right, confers with former FIBA Oceania zone development officer Eddie Calic.

Other people breathe air but Abner Venus, it seems, breathes basketball.

Venus, a staff of the Division of Youth Services, has become synonymous to sports organizing, particularly basketball competitions, as the black and white stripes of the referee's uniform he wears when he calls games at either the Gilbert C. Ada Gymnasium or the Gillette Multi-Purpose Gymnasium.

As a young kid growing up on Saipan, Venus was into sports, with basketball one of his favorites. He was part of the Mt. Carmel Knights two-time champion team that was coached by former lieutenant governor Diego Benavente and NMASA Hall of Famer Jess Wabol. That team brought home the bacon in the 1982 Youth Basketball League and 1983 Interscholastic Basketball League.

Among Venus' teammates at Mt. Carmel were Jose Chong, Rufu Mafnas, Ron Benavente, David Roberto, and Ramon Fernandez.

After high school, the diminutive Venus went home to his native Philippines and tried out for the University of the East, the same team that was already bannered by future Philippine Basketball Association stars Allan Caidic and Jerry Codinera and won the University Athletics Association of the Philippines basketball championships two straights years in 1984 and 1985.

Venus failed to make the team because of the 5'11" height requirement. Unperturbed, he secured an athletic scholarship by joining the school's weightlifting team and competed in UAAP and other competitions.

While the Philippines was his birthplace, the country was no longer home so after college he went back to Saipan and that was when his lifelong passion for sports organization started.

"After college I worked for Mount Carmel School and organized a youth baseball team where we participated in the Little League. Then in 1991 I formed the Toyota Wheels Youth Basketball Team and joined the Saipan Rotary Youth Basketball League."

Throughout the years Venus also became a part of the Philippine Amateur Basketball Association, then joined the Saipan Amateur Basketball Association, which later became the Basketball Association of the Northern Mariana Islands.

Currently, he is part of the board of BANMI, a member of the BANMI Referees Association, and is always tapped to run local leagues like the Rotary, United Filipino Organization Basketball League, and the Tan Holdings Inter-Company Basketball League, among others.

"I also became a board member of NMASA [Northern Mariana Amateur Association]. I wanted to be involved in sports organizing on Saipan because I always wanted to help out."

Among the challenges in organizing basketball competitions on the island is getting businesses to sponsor the events because of the limited budget.

"There are not much teams participating in our BANMI leagues right now because compared to leagues played in the villages, our entrance fees are relatively higher. BANMI games are always played at the Gilbert C. Ada Gymnasium and because of that we have to pay for venue and power usage. On the bright side, because we play indoors, we do not have rained-out or cancelled games."

The island culture of always waiting for the last minute to submit requirements like waiver forms, roster lineups, entrance fees, and signed code of conduct papers also frustrates Venus.

"These type of delays and last-minute submissions always screw up the entire tournament schedule."

Organizing regional games like the 2006 Micronesian Games and the 2009 FIBA Oceania U19 Youth Basketball Tournament, meanwhile, present unique challenges.

"We had to worry about the accommodation, meals, transportation, and etc. of all the participating teams."

He also has gripes about players and coaches who constantly complain to organizers and referees like him.

"Up to now we still have players and coaches who are still not familiar with the rules of the game. Some of our players and coaches are still lost. There are some players and coaches who will just complain but they don't really know what they are complaining about. We referees are also human and we do make mistakes but in every game we always try to do our best that we do not miss a call or two and this is the reason why we always have our pre-game plan and instructions."

To remedy this, Venus suggests that those into basketball should attend coach and referee courses that BANMI usually offers once a year. He said those who have attended these clinics now have a new appreciation for the game.

"In fairness to those who had been joining the BANMI-affiliated basketball leagues we saw a lot of changes from both the coaches and players. In refereeing a game there is no such thing as 'I am the best referee.' It is how you position yourself and be at the right place and time and make sure that you know your call."

With more than 25 years of organizing local sports competitions, Venus said he is proud of what he has done. He is most proud, though, of organizing the 2006 Micronesian Games on Saipan, where he served as tournament director of the basketball competition.

"We were able to prove to all the participating countries and teams that we could host such event without complaints. We had FIBA Oceania Secretary General Steve Smith coming to Saipan to help out with the competition as well as FIBA Oceania's Reagan Kaman helping us with the FIBA Organizer as well as the BANMI website."

The 7th Micronesian Games was also especially memorable for Venus because it was the Games that saw the CNMI Women's National Team bag the gold medal in front of the home crowd.

"Women's National Team coach Elias Rangamar did a fantastic job and up to this time our women's team is still performing at a high level. The next event that I am proud of is the 2009 FIBA Oceania U19 Basketball Tournament, which was held here on Saipan with teams from Australia, New Zealand, and New Caledonia flying in to compete with our national team and other Micronesian national teams."

Next up for Venus is helping BANMI prepare for the 2014 Micronesian Games in Pohnpei, Federated States of Micronesia. BANMI has already committed to sending a men's and women's team to the quadrennial event next June. "I would like to ask those players who would like to be a part of the teams to please come out and try out for the teams."

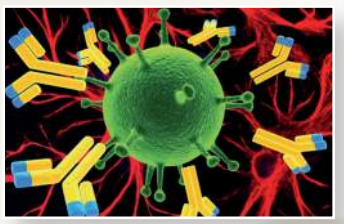
He is also encouraging businesses that want to financially help BANMI to call 234-6547 or visit its website at www.sportingpulse.com.

HEY!
DID YOU KNOW?

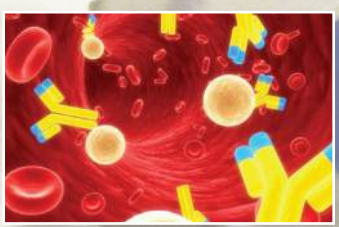
- You are **required** by Public Law 6-10 to have your child/children vaccinated prior to going back-to-school?
- Your child may be suspended from school for non-compliance?
- You can protect your child/children & family, school faculty and its staff, and our community members from crippling and deadly diseases?
- Summer's gone and schools have started but there is still time to get your child/children immunized and/or update their shots?

DO IT NOW!

Child gets required shots. Vaccines build immunity/protection from diseases.



Child develops antibodies which act like little soldiers waiting for diseases to enter the body.



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SCHOOL HEALTH CERTIFICATE
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Our School Inspection Team under the Department of Public Health-Immunization Program is asking for your cooperation. Numerous announcements and community outreach services were completed so that you can have your child vaccinated prior to enrollment and school opening in the CNMI. If you have not done this yet, you still have time...DO IT NOW! You MUST present a valid health certificate like this

NO APPOINTMENT IS NECESSARY.

DIVISION OF PUBLIC HEALTH
C.N.M.I.
HEALTH AND WELL BEING

a path and a view: where the twain actually meets

No other pathway on Saipan offers the most diverse ways to stay fit than the iconic Beach Road Pathway.

From sunrise to sunset, Saipan's Beach Road Pathway provides physical and mental wellness for anyone willing enough to step foot on it—whether it's a 6am jogging, a 4:30pm walking, bicycling at noon, stretching, walking the dogs, taking in the view of a glorious sunset or the idyllic beach, relaxing after a day's work, marathons, walkathons, learning about history, or simply walking to and from work.

The crash of waves and the whisper of a fresh breeze make for a great soundtrack while you are trying to break a sweat.

And it doesn't cost a dime to do any of your preferred fitness activities and sightseeing on this 3-mile stretch from Oleai in the south to Garapan in the north.

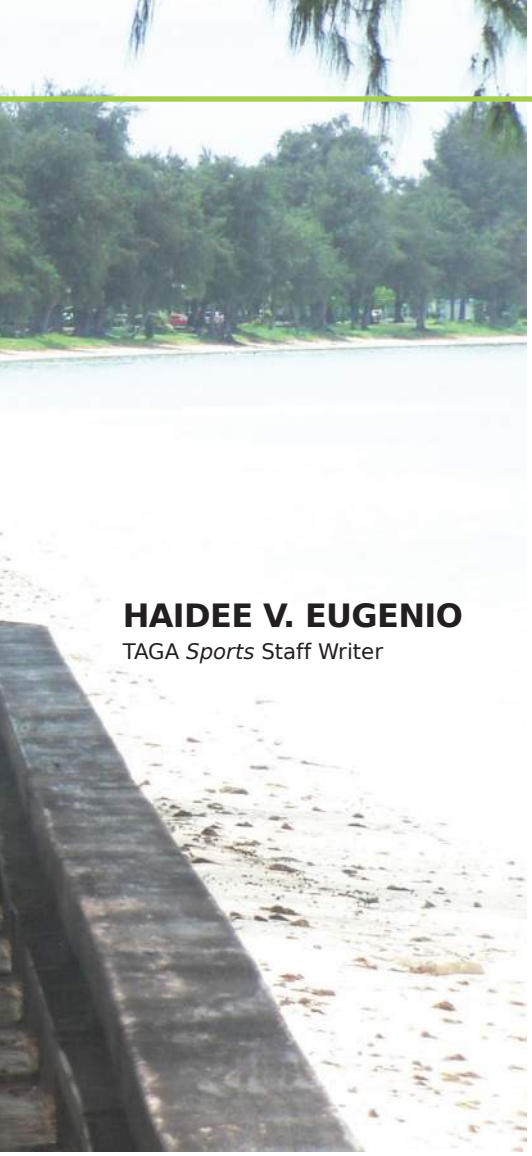
During late spring, the pathway takes on a different glow, thanks to flame trees in full bloom along Beach Road and other thoroughfares.

"I prefer coming to Beach Road Pathway because seeing other people also jogging and walking like me motivates me more to get fit. My regular visits to this pathway have paid off; I've lost weight and right now I'm feeling more fit than ever," said Alejandro Agulto, 27, during one of his regular jogs and walks on the pathway.

The Chalan Kanoa resident said the unobstructed views of the ocean, the flaming sunsets, and the overall island vibe make jogging and walking more enjoyable. His routine starts from the Microl-Beach Road intersection to the 13 Fishermen's Monument, and back.

For the last 10 years, Flordeliza Flores has also made it a point to walk on the Beach Road Pathway every Saturday afternoon or whenever she can.

"It's always refreshing to walk from the area near Oleai Beach Bar & Grill to National Office Supply and back. Walking, they say,



HAIDEE V. EUGENIO
TAGA *Sports* Staff Writer

slows aging, helps lower cholesterol and blood pressure, all those healthy benefits. I believe that. Plus you have great views of the water and the breeze cools you off," she said.

Afternoon walking on this stretch is best experienced with others, she said. At the time of the interview, Flores was walking with her friend, Sylvia Rapada, on the pathway near the intersection of Quartermaster Road and Beach Road.

It is right along this spot where a Japanese World War II tank sits atop a bunker, marking an area known during the war as Red Beach. Panels are strategically placed along the pathway, providing a brief history of Saipan as the sight of fierce fighting between American and Japanese forces during the war.

The pathway follows portions of Beach Road, Saipan's most popular thoroughfare. Some portions of the pathway are much closer to the water and sand than the others, while some are flanked by wooden rails on both sides.

Besides flame trees, needle trees also line the area along the pathway. Wooden and concrete benches provide a perfect spot for resting after a workout or a node to comfortably watch the sun set over the horizon.

For others, these pathway benches are their ticket to enjoying their morning beverage while listening to the waves, or for reading a book while feeling the cool ocean breeze.

And because the pathway provides direct access to the beach, it is not uncommon to see people frolicking in the water or in the sand after walking or jogging. After all, a sandy beach also provides one of the best possible surfaces for a barefoot-running workout.

Department of Public Works Secretary Martin Sablan said the Beach Road Pathway was originally designed for walking and running, but over time, the pathway has been used for many other recreational activities.

"Although there used to be 'no biking' signs, people were still biking on it. But it's still safer to bike there than on the road, especially if there are no bike lanes. Those who bike, those who jog and walk have learned to share the pathway and we hope it will stay that way," he said.

The government is planning to light up most of the pathway lamps once again, to provide a much safer pathway for those using it at night.

"And if we're to do that, I suggest using energy-saving or environment-friendly lights," Sablan said.

Just a few more minutes of walking after you reach the southern end of the pathway on Saturdays is the Sabalu Market, where you can find fresh fruits, vegetables and refreshments.

The northern end of the pathway, meanwhile, takes you to the Tuesday Night Farmers' Market or the Thursday Night Garapan Street Market, where you can feast on local and international cuisine and locally grown fruits and vegetables, along with souvenir items and live entertainment that includes cultural dances.

For families living near Beach Road, the pathway has become an extended portion of their backyard.

Karla Cobacha, 7, says she always tags along with adult members of the family when they go to the Beach Road Pathway and surrounding areas.

"We play here, and we swim too. My dad taught me how to swim," she said.

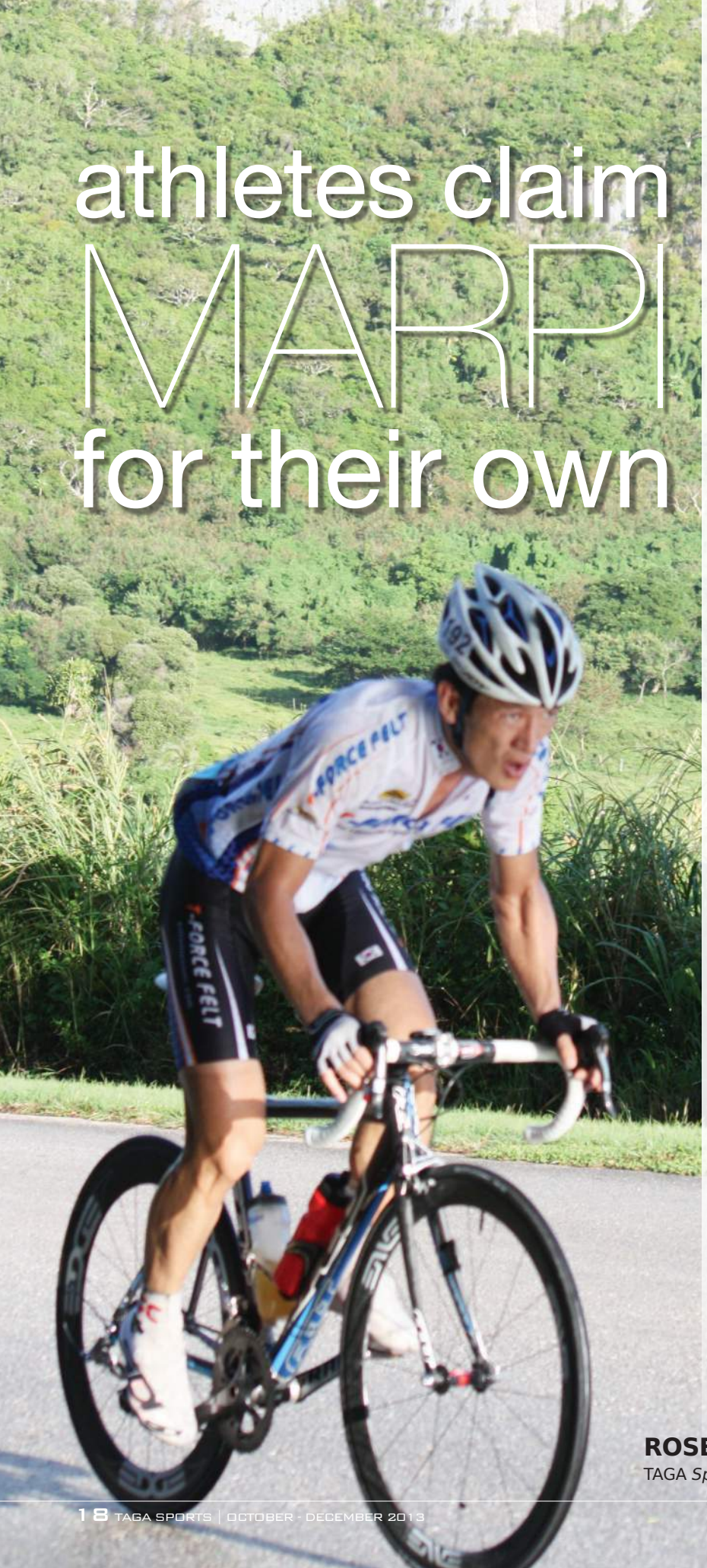
For Natividad Kaipat, 41, the pathway and its environs are more than a hangout for the whole family.

"We sit here, we have our lunches here, we watch people and vehicles pass by, we watch over our kids swimming in the ocean. We are here at the pathway two to three times a week. It's much different from staying at home especially in the afternoons," added Kaipat, a mother of eight.

Relaxing by the pathway and taking in the views of the blue expanse helps Kaipat "clear" her mind.

"And we wait for the sunset," she said, as the family prepares to walk back home. "It always gives a very good feeling to be here."

athletes claim MARPI for their own



This December, hundreds of bikers participating in the Hell of Marianas will cruise past scenic Marpi. Several decades ago, this was not possible, as Marpi was closed to the public.

"You will be shot, no questions asked," said David M. Sablan, whose father, Elias, was the mayor of Saipan when Marpi was used as a training center by the Naval Tactical Training Unit.

"It was totally restricted from the public. There was a gate (from the former Nikko Hotel area) and only personnel, trainees, and officials of NTTU (Naval Tactical Training Unit) were allowed inside," said Sablan.

These days, more than 60 years after the war, Marpi is undergoing another transformation, this time as a favorite place for athletes to train and island residents to exercise. Marpi is frequented today by bikers, runners, and other athletes training for high-level competitions.

Sablan himself is elated by this new development. "I am happy that right now besides the tourists, athletes are going there to train and enjoy the beauty of Marpi. Marpi has a new image."

He pointed out that Marpi remains unspoiled, its moss-covered caves, big and tall trees, widespread vegetation, and clean water untouched. He said the area kept its natural beauty even though the local government began developing Marpi as a tourist spot in 1998.

It is because of its undamaged beauty that longtime Saipan resident Suzy Kindel goes to Marpi almost every day.

"Marpi's historic, cultural, archeological, scenic, and natural wonders attract me, athletes, and tourists to the area. I go out to Marpi almost every day, whether to swim in the lagoon or in the 50-meter pool, run or meet friends at PauPau beach for the sunset or go to Banzai for excellent stargazing due to the lack of lights," Kindel said.

TRAINING GROUND

Ben Babauta, who will be racing in this year's Hell of Marianas, bikes regularly at Marpi because of its ideal location.

"I love the scenic route, the four corners (Suicide Cliff, Bird Island, Grotto, and Banzai Cliff), the history of this area and more so the forest. It is peaceful, has no traffic, clean, and safe," Babauta said.

Butch Sublemente, who runs and bikes in Marpi in preparation for the 2013 XTERRA World Championship in Hawaii, said the variety of courses the northern side of the island has to offer is a good training ground for athletes.

"If you want to improve your handling and balancing skills, train in Marpi and go to the trails," said Sublemente.

And it's not just the view; it's also the interesting experiences one has when visiting Marpi.

Kindel remembers her encounter with a cow, lightning, and dolphins.

"One night years ago while running with Carl Pogue down from the 'triangle' (the split between Suicide and

ROSELYN B. MONROYO
TAGA *Sports* Staff Writer

the storied history of marpi

the Grotto/Bird Island) lightning was striking all around us. There was nothing we could do but keep running. I couldn't stop myself from screaming every time lightning struck. There was also a time while running with Alexis Fallon, a mother cow came charging at us and it was really frightening. Now the farmers are doing a better at not letting their cows roam. Then, recently while running toward Banzai, our group saw dolphins and it was a first for me and very exciting," Kindel.

PRESERVATION CALL

Kindel and many others who've fallen in love with the natural charms of Marpi wish that the local government, residents, and tourists would do their share to preserve the area's history and beauty. Of particular concerns are reports of plans to build homesteads in the area and the installation of aboveground electric lines.

"The local government must acknowledge that the majority of Marpi is a national historic landmark, that a large part of Marpi is a conservation area and that the area is the island's No. 1 tourist attraction. Therefore, no homesteads or hotel/golf course developments should be allowed out there. If Marpi needs power, it should be underground power or alternative sources such as solar should be allowed," said Kindel.

"Also I consider PauPau and Wing beaches parts of Marpi and both these beaches should be left undeveloped. No hotels and no motorized boat traffic should be allowed north of The Palms Hotel in order to leave the PauPau Lagoon safe for paddleboarding, kayaking, and swimming," she added.

Sublemente calls for the maintenance of the trails and responsible ownership of pets for everyone's safety. He said visitors, whether tourists or residents, should avoid throwing trash on their way to and out of Marpi.

Kindel echoed Sublemente's sentiments. "Historically Marpi provided the cleanest air on island but now there are smokes coming from burning at some of the farms and bad smell from the landfill and the garbage trucks that have hurt the area in my opinion. I am personally disappointed that the landfill is in Marpi and in a location that is clearly visible from the top of the Suicide Cliff, which every tourist visits," Kindel said.

The Naval Tactical Training Unit based in Marpi was operated by the U.S. Navy and aimed to prepare military personnel for the brewing wars in the Korean Peninsula and Vietnam.

David M. Sablan said no local residents knew what really went on inside the restricted zone, but Saipanese understood that a "special operation" was in place, as airplanes were seen circling around the island once or twice a week, living quarters and offices were built at the Army Hill (now called the Capital Hill), and booming sounds from explosives and other ammunitions were heard by residents passing near the area.

"Even visiting Russians from the United Nations Trusteeship Council were curious what was going on there, but none of them were allowed entry to Marpi," Sablan said.

The training facility was on Saipan from 1950 to 1962 and though NTTU ceased operation after 12 years, Marpi remained closed to the public for nearly five years as many unexploded ordnance remained in the area.

Human remains were also all over Marpi, according to Kurt Barnes, who was one of the few residents allowed to visit the northern tip of the island after NTTU closed. The remains were from those who died during World War II.

"As I walked past the boonies and saw human bones, goosebumps hit me. I can just imagine how many lives were lost during the war," Barnes said.

Sablan also recalled an unfortunate story during World War II.

"My brother Ignacio told me that there was one Korean who came to him. He was crying because he lost his wife and children. The Korean pushed his wife and the child she was carrying as he intended to follow into the cliff [Suicide Cliff], but when it was his turn to jump, he backed out," said Sablan.

After the war and when NTTU closed, Marpi became a sort of a grave for several years. Memorials were built there and in the 1990s, families of Okinawans, Koreans, and Japanese who perished during the war came to Saipan hoping to collect their remains.

Ponce and Merissa Rasa own SUP SPN, which offers standup paddling tutorials and equipment rental to tourists and residents alike.

ROSELYN MONROYO

standup paddling comes to saipan

ROSELYN B. MONROYO
TAGA *Sports* Staff Writer

Living on an island paradise like Saipan gives one an endless list of water sports or activities to try.

Standup paddling, or SUP, is the recent addition on the list or, according to Ponce and Merissa Rasa, is actually rejoining the lineup. The Rasas own SUP SPN, which offers standup paddling tutorials and equipment rental to tourists and residents alike.

"I believe it was a certain Mr. Tomita from Windsurfing Saipan who introduced SUP on Saipan. His shop was the only one where we saw boards for rent three or four years ago," said Merrisa, who got hooked on SUP a few years ago and wanted to share her passion to others.

"In March this year we put up SUP SPN and had our first rental operation in April. With our glittering shoreline, cool, turquoise waters, and soft sand, Saipan is the perfect place to learn how to standup paddle boarding. Our beaches offer something different in scenery both above and below the waters. Eagle and sting rays, sea urchins, starfishes, baby black tip sharks, sea turtles, shipwrecks, World War II tanks, the lighthouse, and various colorful fishes are just a few of the beautiful sights you may encounter while stand up paddle boarding in our lagoon," Ponce said.

So what is stand-up paddling?

According to the Rasa couple, it is a recent form of surfing and the kind that provides longer navigation. As the name suggests, one must use a paddle to move the board around.

WHAT YOU NEED

- **Standup paddleboard**: A wide and flatter one for novice and heavier paddlers for stability. Narrower for experienced ones. A standup paddleboard costs between $400 and $1,000, depending on the brand. If your budget is limited, SUP SPN offers equipment rental (both board and paddle) at $25 for two hours, $40 for four hours, and $55 for up to eight hours.
- **Paddle**: Standup paddles differ from those used in canoe racing. They have an angle or "elbow" in the shaft for maximum efficiency. Recommended sizes are 6 to 8 inches or 8 to 10 inches taller that your height. A paddle costs between $40 and $400.
- **PFD (Proper Floating Device)**: For safety and compliance, as the U.S. Coast Guard considers paddleboards vessels. Each costs between $400 to a couple of hundreds, depending on the brand.
- **Clothing**: These vary depending on water conditions. Wetsuits are recommended for cold weather, while shorts, bathing suits, or shirt are fine on sunny days. Light clothing will ease movement as you navigate on the water.
- **Sun protection**: Sunglasses, sunscreen, sun visors, or hats are recommended.

WHERE TO GO

Saipan is ideal for starters with its relatively calm waters. SUP SPN, which has already served nearly 200 individuals (in the 6 to 65 age group) advises first timers to go the waters along Beach Road, Oleai, Kilili, and the Civic Center and the experienced ones to the waters off Aquarius Beach Hotel. The company's staff also delivers and picks up equipment at the chosen spot so there is no need to worry about transporting the paddles and standup paddleboards.

A free 10-minute introductory lesson comes with the rental deal, while scheduled lessons is $35 for one person and $55 for two. Both last one-and-a-half hour.

WHAT TO DO

Bringing the equipment into the water is the first step. Majority of standup paddleboards have built-in handle, so reach for it and tuck the board under one of your arms, while you carry the paddle in the other.

To stand up, slowly move up one foot (the dominant one) and then the next one with your knees slightly bent and squared off to your shoulder as you go up. It helps to have someone with you to stabilize the board and hand you the paddle to get ready for proper paddle boarding stance.

Next up is getting into the paddleboard. For beginners, the best way is to kneel at the center near the built-in handle and place the paddle across the deck of the board. Before hopping into the board, don't forget to leash your ankle (use the dominant side for stability). Once kneeling, keep both hands on either side of the board (again for stability).

Feet should be parallel and hip-width apart. Stay in between the board edges with toes pointed, knees bent, and back straight. Head and shoulder must be steady and upright, with only your hips shifting for movement.

To go down the board, follow the kneeling steps. If you fall without attempting to go down the board, it is better to drop to the water than to the board itself.

From the proper paddle boarding stance, you are now ready to paddle. For starters, paddle close to the board with your arms straight and twist from your torso. When paddling to your right, your right hand is on the shaft and your left on the top all the way to the grip (paddling on kneeling position has the same hand position, but the other hand is way below the handle). Go for short strokes (4 to 5 strokes on each side), pushing the blade under the surface and pulling it back to your ankle and out of the water.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

Slides show a series of shots showing Noriko Togawa in action during the 2005 Johnny Walker Cup in Perth, Australia and posing with Australian professional golfer Adam Scott.

NORIKO TOGAWA

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Nine-time Tournament of Champions winner Noriko Togawa poses with, from left, daughter Yuko, Jeong Yoon Kim, and Leina Kim during a recent tournament.

driven to perfection

MARK RABAGO
TAGA *Sports* Associate Editor

The winningest female golfer on island actually got a late start in the game as Noriko Togawa only picked up golf when she was 35 years old.

The nine-time Tournament of Champions winner decided to make the sport a hobby as a way to bond with her husband, at a time when their children where already entering junior high school in their native Japan.

Eventually the family moved to Saipan and, with the island teeming with world-class golf courses, it was but natural that Togawa would take advantage and further hone her skills in the greens and fairways of the tropical island.

The owner of SNE Saipan Co. Ltd, which operates several apartments on Saipan, would eventually make her mark in the sport in the CNMI.

In her 19 years of playing in local golf tournaments, Togawa has accumulated a small treasure trove of championship trophies—34 in all—making her the undisputed queen of golf courses in the Northern Marianas.

For the record, Togawa's lowest score in a golf tournament is a 1-under 71. She, however, confided that she shot a 3-under 69 during some of her practice rounds.

The record nine TOC ladies flight championship she has taken home were in 1996, 1998, 1999, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, and 2008.

Togawa said her secret for her unrivaled brilliance is practice. Even at a respectable 55 years old, she still hits the driving range and golf courses like a woman half her age.

"I practice two to three times a week now. If I'm not in the golf course or driving range, I'm at home practicing my swing in front of a mirror," she said.

That doggone pursuit of perfection has resulted in many blisters in Togawa's hands, but the occasional rawness here and there is a sacrifice Togawa is all too willing to make in exchange for improvement.

"I love golf. It is a challenge for me. Even though I'm tired, if I see my effort in the golf course is rewarded by a good score, I won't feel as tired."

Also helping her performance in the golf course is her balanced diet, which consists of meat, fish, vegetables, and dried food like seaweeds without additives.

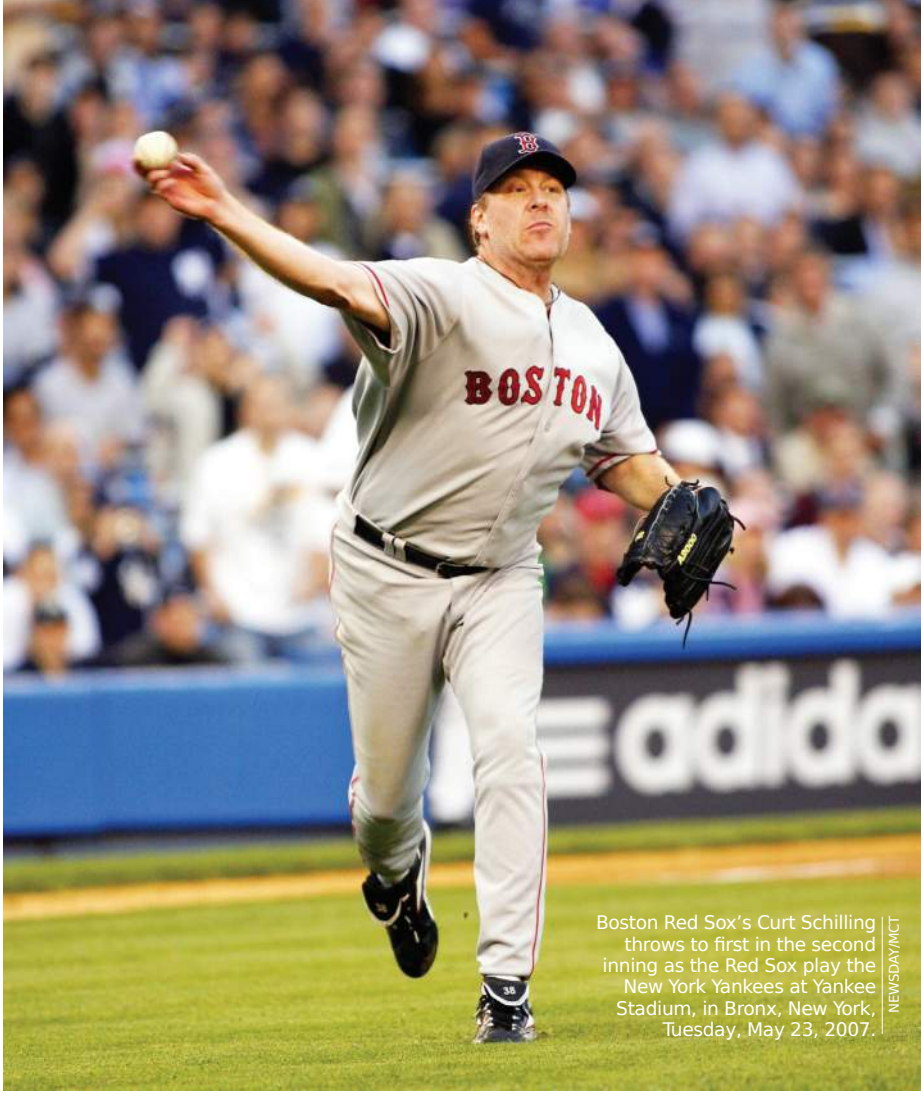
As much as possible she stays away from too sweet and too salty foods. "I just cannot take too much sugar or salt."

Togawa also swears on the value of stretching. She said it helps prevent injuries and is always a good warm up before hitting the links.

When not in the golf course, driving range, or practicing her swing in front of a mirror, Togawa keeps herself busy by tending to her garden or cooking in the family kitchen.

Her advice to aspiring par-busters is to play the game with passion and focus more on improving your game rather than just winning tournaments. Instead of trying to beat opposing players, it is even better to try and beat the golf course, she said.

Practice in also very important, she emphasized, and it becomes more bearable if you do it with a practice partner to encourage you on.



Boston Red Sox's Curt Schilling throws to first in the second inning as the Red Sox play the New York Yankees at Yankee Stadium, in Bronx, New York, Tuesday, May 23, 2007. NEWSDAY/MCT

a few things to know about pitching

JOE POSNANSKI
Knight Ridder

The key thing about pitching is that you have to mix it up. Give 'em a curve when they're expecting the heater. Then, when they're looking for the soft stuff, bust them inside with some high cheese. Toss in a change-up to make 'em look silly. And when you're inside the hitter's mind, when you can see his head spinning, that's when you throw the fastball right down Main Street, belt-high over the heart of the plate.

Gets 'em every time.

Here, we're going to give you all sorts of thoughts about pitching, only we're going to mix it up, too. Give you a fastball, a few curves, a slider or two. We'll tell you who threw the fastest fastball ever, and the answer might surprise you. We'll give you a little advice, Satchel Paige-style. We'll teach you how to throw a knuckleball. We'll tell you a good Johnny Bench story.

We'll give you a statistic so surprising, you might never view pitching the same way again.

And what the heck, we might throw in a couple of other pitches, some quotes, some advice, and definitely some knuckleballs. A few years ago, someone congratulated the great knuckleballer Phil Niekro for winning 300 games. Niekro smiled.

"Imagine," he said, "how good I could have been if I knew where the ball was going."

THROWING A KNUCKLEBALL

So, you want to throw a knuckleball. Well, who can blame you? If you can get it down, you could have a very nice career. You could be Hoyt Wilhelm or Charlie Hough or one of the Niekro brothers.

Question: Why are knuckleball pitchers always right-handed?

Answer: They are not. Yes, it's true that of the 60 or so major-league pitchers who made a living mostly throwing knuckleballs, almost all are right-handed. But there are exceptions, the main one being Wilbur Wood, who threw 118 complete games in his career. There was also Bobby Shantz, a 5-foot-6 knuckler who won 24 games with Philadelphia in 1954. And there's a personal favorite, Bud Daley, who was born right-handed but taught himself how to throw the knuckler lefty after contracting polio as a child.

> So, how do you catch a knuckleball? "Pick it up when it stops rolling."
>
> —Bob Uecker

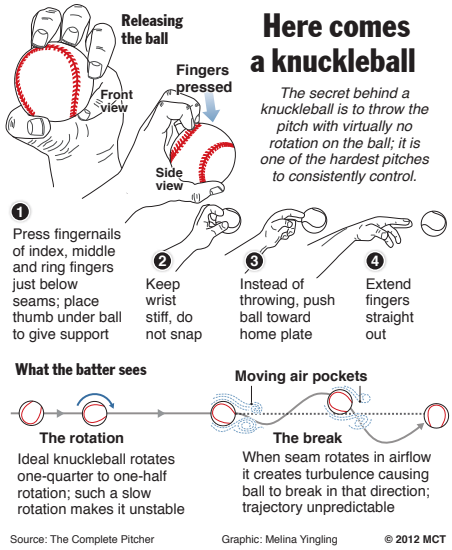
Here's how you throw a knuckleball, lefty or righty:

1. You grip the ball with three fingers, your index, middle and ring fingers. Some grip it with just two fingers, but you get more action with three fingers.

2. Dig your nails into the ball just above the seams. Really dig in there. That's the difference between a pitch that flutters and one that kind of just lies there.

3. Pitch the ball, outstretching those fingers just as you release. If you do it just right, the ball will come out with little or no spin. And if you do it just right, the ball will dance.

"Like trying to hit a mosquito," Kansas City's Mike Sweeney says.


Releasing the ball
Fingers pressed
Front view
Side view
Here comes a knuckleball
The secret behind a knuckleball is to throw the pitch with virtually no rotation on the ball; it is one of the hardest pitches to consistently control.
1 Press fingernails of index, middle and ring fingers just below seams; place thumb under ball to give support
2 Keep wrist stiff, do not snap
3 Instead of throwing, push ball toward home plate
4 Extend fingers straight out
What the batter sees
Moving air pockets
The rotation
Ideal knuckleball rotates one-quarter to one-half rotation; such a slow rotation makes it unstable
The break
When seam rotates in airflow it creates turbulence causing ball to break in that direction; trajectory unpredictable
Source: The Complete Pitcher
Graphic: Melina Yingling
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FASTEST PITCHER OF ALL TIME

People argue all the time about the fastest pitcher of all-time. Most would tell you it was Nolan Ryan, whose fastball was once clocked at 100.9 mph in a 1974 game against the Chicago White Sox. That's still listed in the Guinness Book of World Records.

But, long before that, you had Bob Feller, who once threw a baseball in a race against a motorcycle. After much figuring, some scientists decided the pitch was going 104 mph. This was, of course, before radar guns. We know the motorcycle was going 86 mph. Nobody's quite sure how they came up with that 104 mph number.

SCIENTIST 1: That pitch was going a lot faster than that motorcycle.

SCIENTIST 2: Yeah. I'd say it was going, like, 104 mph.

SCIENTIST 1: At least.

In any case, Walter Johnson always said he could throw harder than Feller. And Johnson was no braggart. He readily admitted that he could not throw as hard as Smokey Joe Wood. Satchel Paige, another nominee for fastest pitcher ever, also conceded to Wood.

"I threw so hard," Wood used to say, "I thought my arm would fly right off my body."

There are other contenders, too. Ryne Duren, they say, could throw well over 100 mph, and he wore glasses that were an inch thick, and during warm-ups he would purposely throw the ball over the catcher's head. Just for show. Sudden Sam McDowell threw bullets, and so did Sandy Koufax and Bob Gibson and a guy named for it, Bullet Joe Rogan.

But one guy was faster than any of them.

FORT WORTH STAR-TELEGRAM/MCT

Texas Rangers pitching coach Mike Maddux at practice at the team's spring training complex in Surprise, Arizona.

'Show me a guy who can't pitch inside, and I'll show you a loser.'
Sandy Koufax

HERE'S A BIT OF ODD SCIENCE

A guy named Voros McCracken has broken down pitchers' numbers, and he has confirmed a fascinating concept. You have to follow closely. It's kind of complicated. But essentially, McCracken has found that starting pitchers, no matter how good or bad they are, have very little ability to prevent hits if the hitter gets his bat on the ball.

This is wild stuff. It goes totally against logic. You would expect that Randy Johnson or Pedro Martinez would give up fewer hits on balls in play than, say, Jeff Suppan. But the exact opposite is true.

Last year, when the ball was hit against Suppan, about 30 percent of the time it was a hit.

When the ball was hit against Johnson, it turned into a hit about 34 percent of the time. In 1999, when Pedro Martinez won the Cy Young, balls in play turned into hits about 33 percent of the time.

You say that's just a statistical fluke. But it isn't. The more research you do, the more you find that pitchers, whether it's Roger Clemens or Chad Durbin, have very little control on whether a batted ball turns into a hit. The defense might have some control, but, again, research suggests very little. According to the league average, hit balls become hits about 30 percent of the time.

Sure, some pitchers are luckier in any given year, like Oakland's Cory Lidle, who gave up hits only about 26 percent of the time last year.

Some are not as lucky, like Clemens, who gave up hits almost 33 percent of the time.

But it's just that. Luck. Maybe not all luck. But mostly. You would expect Greg Maddux to be a master of making batters hit the ball at fielders, right? Well, truth is, sometimes he is (in 1998, he allowed hits only about 26 percent of the time, among the league's best) and sometimes he isn't (the very next year he allowed hits 32 percent of the time, among the league's worst).

You ask: What does any of this mean? Well, that's the interesting part. It seems pretty convincing that pitchers have very little control over preventing hits once the ball is put into play. So, the question is, what separates pitchers?

Here's what separates them: Walks. Strikeouts. Home runs allowed.

And that's pretty much it. The best pitchers don't walk guys. That's what makes Maddux and Martinez so special. They don't put extra people on base.

The best pitchers get a lot of strikeouts. Batters can't get a hit if they don't put the ball in play. Strikeouts are what make Johnson and Curt Schilling so dominant.

And the best pitchers don't give up home runs. Last year, two pitchers gave up hits almost exactly 30 percent of the time the ball was hit. One was Oakland's Tim Hudson, who won 18 games and is one of the best pitchers in the American League. The other was Blake Stein, who struggled so much he got shoved to the Royals' bullpen.

The big difference? Hudson gave up just 20 home runs in 235 innings.

Stein gave up 20 home runs in a little more than half the innings.

So there you have it. You want to judge pitching? Watch those three things. Do they walk people? Do they strike them out? Do they give up home runs? That's more or less all you really need to know.

'The dumber a pitcher is, the better.' Dizzy Dean

His name is Steve Dalkowski. And you almost certainly have never heard of him. But let's just say that no other pitcher had a fastball that once tore off a piece of a batter's ear and, another time, smashed through an umpire's mask, giving the poor guy a concussion.

You want Dalkowski stories? There are millions. The lefty once won a bet with a teammate who said he couldn't throw a ball through a wall. He once hit a guy in the back. Unfortunately, the guy was buying a hot dog at the time.

He once pitched in batting practice to Ted Williams, who, of course, is known for having the greatest batting eye in baseball history. Williams said he never even saw the first pitch.

How fast did he throw? Former Baltimore manager Earl Weaver said faster than anybody ever. Some have guessed 110 mph. When Dalkowski was 19, he struck out 121 batters in 62 innings in the minor leagues. That was the year he threw a no-hitter and struck out 24, but lost 8-4 thanks to 18 walks and six wild pitches.

The next year, he had 262 strikeouts and 262 walks.

Steve Dalkowski never did find his control. And, as you might expect, he hurt his arm and never did pitch in the big leagues. But before that, he was clocked by the Baltimore Orioles. They clocked him one day after he had thrown 150 pitches in a game. He threw without the aid of a pitcher's mound.

Dalkowski's fastball was still clocked at 99 mph.

THE SECRET OF PITCHING

Everybody wants to know the secret of pitching. The great Warren Spahn, who won more games than any lefty, used to say it's upsetting the hitter's timing. Yankees manager Joe Torre said it's getting ahead of hitters. Earl Weaver said it is throwing the exact pitch the hitter does not expect. Tom Seaver said it's pitching within yourself. Bill Monbouquette, who won 20 with the Red Sox in '63, says it's making adjustments.

Andy Campbell, coach of Assumption High in Davenport, Iowa, says the secret is "location, location, location."

Hey, you never know where you will find the secret.

But, the best answer came, not surprisingly, from Greg Maddux. If anybody knows the secret, it's Maddux. He doesn't have a 97-mph fastball. He doesn't have the nastiest slider you ever saw. He doesn't, in fact, have any of the best pitches. At the end of Maddux games, hitters always say, "I don't know why we didn't hit him."

Maddux knows the secret, all right.

"The secret," Maddux says, "is making your strikes look like balls and your balls look like strikes."

There you go. The secret. Finally. Now, all you have to do is figure out what the heck that means.

> 'You spend a good piece of your life gripping a baseball, and in the end it turns out that it was the other way around all the time.'
>
> Jim Bouton

A SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP

Pitchers and catchers have a very special relationship. As proof, here's a Johnny Bench story that is told often in Cincinnati. Some say it's just legend. But I believe it.

In 1968, Bench was a rookie, and he was catching a spring-training game. He noticed that pitcher Jim Maloney's fastball was not popping. So he started asking for curves. Maloney, a veteran, kept shaking off Bench.

Finally, Bench went to the mound.

"Your fastball's not popping," Bench said. Even as a rookie, he was blunt about such things.

" $&$!(AT) (AT)!" Maloney replied. Pitchers tend to be blunt also.

Bench nodded and went back behind the plate. He called for a curveball. Maloney shook him off. So, he called for the fastball. Maloney threw his hardest one.

Johnny Bench dropped his glove and caught the ball bare-handed.

The story goes that Maloney did not shake off Bench's signals after that.

> How to tell the difference between a slider and a curveball:
> *"If you see the ball curve, that's a curveball. If the ball seems to go straight, only the hitter misses by three feet, that's the slider."*
>
> Hall of Famer Billy Williams

> "Most of the managers are lifetime .220 hitters. For years, pitchers have been getting these managers out...and that's why they don't like us."
>
> Bill Lee

SOME WORDS OF WISDOM

Nobody knows exactly how many games Satchel Paige pitched. Heck, nobody knows for sure how old he was when he died. But the best guess is that he was 76 when he died in Kansas City, and that over the years he pitched in some 2,600 games, won 2,100 of them, threw 300 shutouts and struck out more than 10,000 hitters. Those are just guesses.

We do know Joe DiMaggio called him the best he ever saw.

Ted Williams, too.

Here's a little pitching wisdom and general wisdom from Satchel Paige, courtesy of a wonderful little book, *Satchel Sez*.

"Let the ball flow from your hand like it's water."

"It's simple: Keep the ball away from the bat."

"Just take the ball and throw it where you want to. Home plate don't move."

"Don't pray when it rains if you don't pray when the sun shines."

"Work like you don't need the money."

"Too many pitchers got the hurry-ups. Slow down. You last longer."

"When you meet someone who gives you the settle down feeling, well, sir, it's just time to settle down."

"If you tell a lie, rehearse it. If it don't sound good to you, it won't sound good to anybody else."

"Don't look back, something might be gaining on you."

GOLF BANS 'ANCHORED' PUTTERS

JOE JULIANO
The Philadelphia Inquirer

Stu Ingraham has utilized an anchored stroke with a long putter for the last 23 years, a span during which he has won Philadelphia Section PGA player of the year honors on eight occasions including last year.

So Ingraham strongly disagrees with the joint decision by the U.S. Golf Association and the Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St. Andrews to ban an anchored putting stroke, either with a long putter or a belly putter, saying the stroke goes against the traditional golf swing where a club is gripped with both hands away from the body.

"I'm incredibly disappointed by this," said Ingraham, 53, a teaching pro at M-Golf Range in Newtown Square, Pa. "It doesn't make any sense to me. They're looking at it as an advantage. You're not going to change a rule unless you feel someone is taking an advantage. There's no reason to. It's an opportunity to survive and enjoy the game of golf."

The decision by golf's major ruling bodies is included in what is now Rule 14-1b. Going into effect on Jan. 1, 2016, the rule is directed at players who use long putters and belly putters where the butt end is stationary or pressed against the upper part of the abdomen. It does not ban such putters, just the act of the anchored stroke.

Four of the last six winners of a major championship utilized an anchored stroke, the latest being Adam Scott with a long putter at the Masters. Webb Simpson uses a belly putter.

Michael Hyland won the Philadelphia Amateur twice with an anchored stroke and used a different putter both times—belly in 2000, long in 2011. He thinks the success of major champions with that style prompted the USGA to take action.

"There aren't enough guys in the top 20 on the tour using the anchored putting," Hyland said. "When guys started winning majors with it, they got freaked out. They made this decision based on that, not based on the people who go out and enjoy playing the game."

USGA president Glen Nager said the rule change "protects one of the important challenges in the game—the free swing of the entire club.

"The traditional stroke involves swinging the club with both the club and gripping hands held away from the body, requiring the player to direct and control movement of the entire club," Nager said at a press conference at USGA headquarters in Far Hills, N.J.

"Anchoring is different. Intentionally securing one end of the club against the body and creating a point of physical attachment around which the club is swung, is a substantial departure from that traditional free swing."

The PGA Tour and the PGA of America have been opposed to the ban on anchored putting. Both organizations said they will discuss the decision internally over the coming weeks before deciding whether, and how, to implement the rule. PGA Tour commissioner Tim Finchem has said it is important for golf to be played under one set of rules.

The LPGA said in a brief statement that it would implement the rule in its events effective Jan. 1, 2016.

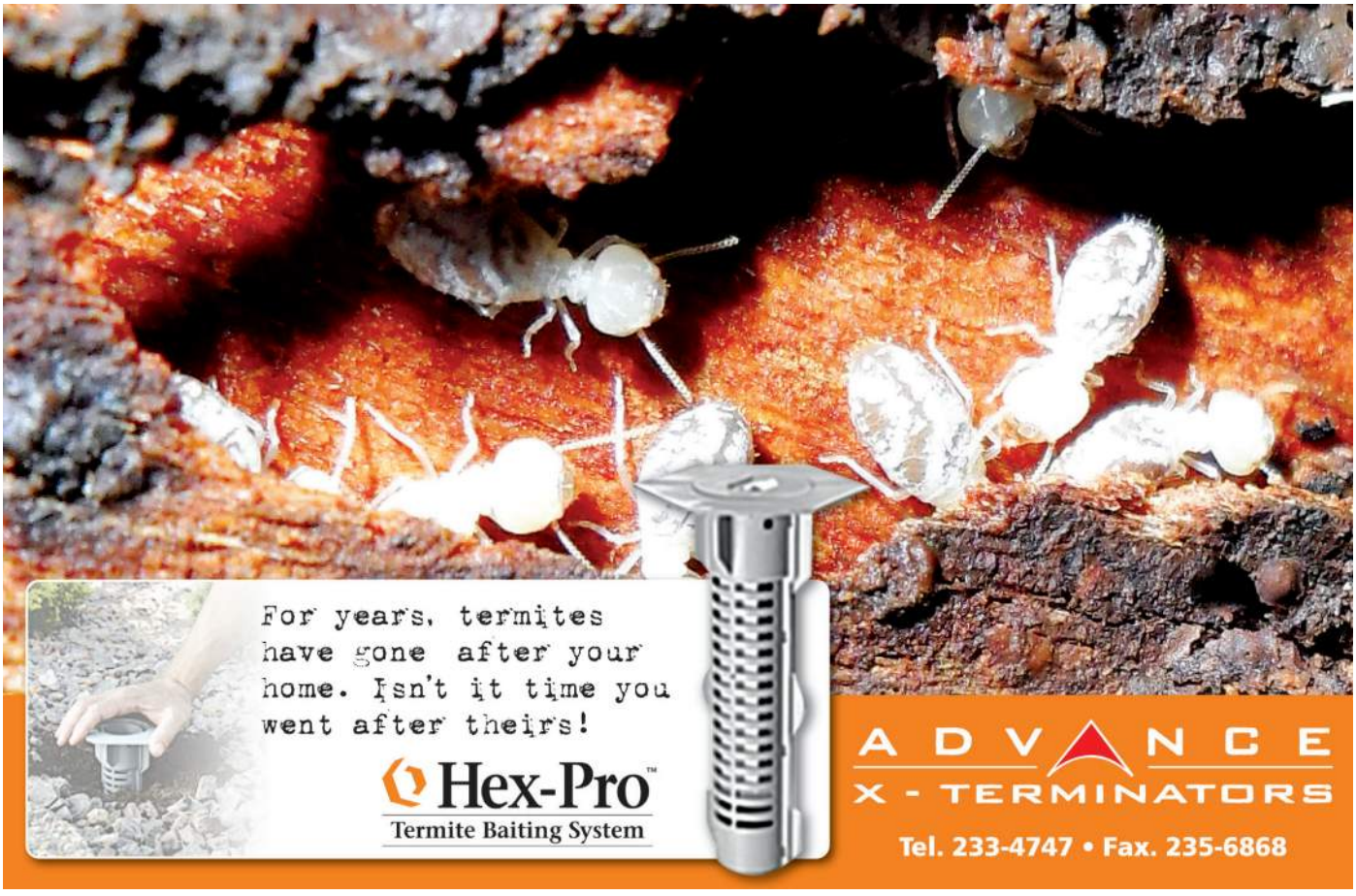
Ted Bishop, president of the PGA of America, which represents more than 27,000 club professionals, said the decision prompts concern "about the negative impact it may have on both the enjoyment and growth of the game."

Nager said he didn't think the ban would limit the enjoyment of the game for the higher-handicap recreational players.

"We understand that some golfers are expressing concern with this change," Nager said. "But the proper solution is not to allow alternation of the challenges of the game and pull the game apart, but rather to work together to help these golfers overcome their concerns."

Ingraham, a longtime PGA of America member, agrees.

"Golf is doing everything to get people to enjoy the game, but this is not doing that," he said. "Golf needs a boost for positive expression and this, to me, is like taking a divot out of someone's forehead. You can make all the justifications in the world for anchoring. That's just trying to justify a stupid decision, in my opinion."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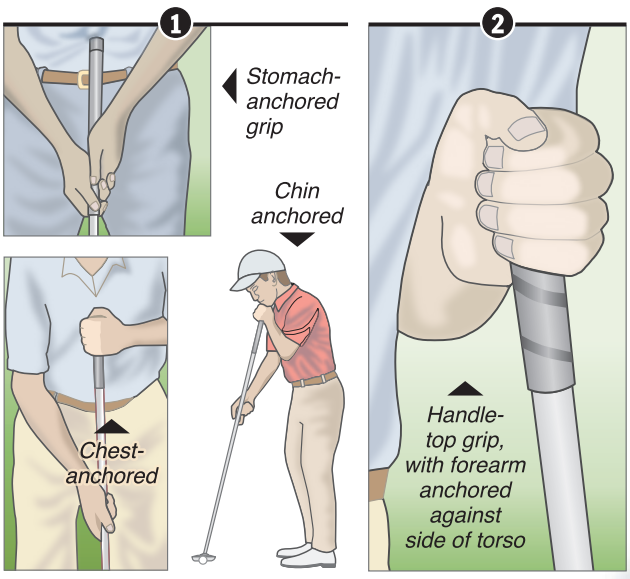
Golfing bodies rule 'anchored putting' will be banned in 2016

The two associations governing pro golf, the U.S. Golf Association and the Royal and Ancient, have agreed to ban anchored putting. The rule takes effect Jan. 1, 2016. Several successful pros on the tour use the technique, and some have been arguing against the rule change. What it's all about:

What is anchored putting?

1. Golfers secure the end of the handle of a longer style of putter against the body at the chin, chest or stomach

2. In one variation, players clasp the end of the handle with a hand and brace that forearm against the torso



2013 Masters champion Adam Scott

• Has used a chest-anchored style since the start of the 2011 season

Examining one anchored grip

• Hand firmly grips top of handle, braces it against the chest; hand does not move relative to that spot

• The other hand lightly grasps the midpoint of the handle, controls the stroke of the putter's head

• Scott is right-handed

The rule will not ban long putters

Why the change?

• Officials say the technique produces unfair advantage by reducing pressure, nerves, hand twitches during the stroke

Will it affect your game?

• The PGA of America has yet to say whether it will adopt the rule as a standard for nonprofessional play; some officials remain adamantly opposed to the change

What the rule, No. 14-1b, will say

In making a stroke, the player must not anchor the club, either "directly" or by use of an "anchor point"

• Note 1

A club is anchored directly when the player intentionally holds the club or a gripping hand in contact with any part of his body, except that the player may hold the club or a gripping hand against a hand or forearm

• Note 2

An anchor point exists when the player intentionally holds a forearm in contact with any part of his body to establish a gripping and as a stable point around which the other hand may swing the club

Review process and timeline

2011-12 Governing bodies observe dramatic increase in use of anchoring

Through February 2013 Review of the practice conducted

November 2013 Proposed rule change announced

Spring 2013 - December 2015 Transition period; players may adapt stroke to comply, if needed

2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015

January 2016 Rule takes effect

Source: United States Golf Association, PGA of America, AP, MCT Photo Service

Graphic: Robert Dorrell

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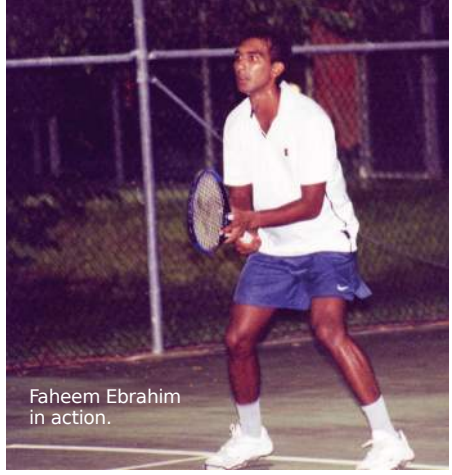
WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Faheem Ebrahim

MARK RABAGO
TAGA *Sports* Associate Editor


Faheem Ebrahim in action.

MARK RABAGO

Former Saipan resident Faheem Ebrahim poses with his wife, Chris, and their son, Jonah in Bangkok, Thailand.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Saipan made such an impression on Faheem Ebrahim that seven years since he left he still has fond memories of the island and hopes one day to return and enjoy its majestic sunsets.

A native of Hong Kong, the now 32-year-old Ebrahim made the CNMI his home after Pacific Islands Club Saipan recruited him as a clubmate back in 2002.

He barely warmed the tennis pro seat at the San Antonio hotel when Hyatt Regency Saipan came calling and offered him a job as spa and recreation manager.

Even as he held very demanding jobs, all was not work and no play for Ebrahim as the reed thin but superior athlete managed to dominate the local tennis scene during his short stint living on the island.

Among his successful exploits was topping the Shell Tennis Open Tournament men's open after beating Daniel Son in 2002.

He also won the same division's DFS Micronesian Open Championships the same year after outlasting then Pacific Oceania team captain Jeff Race.

Ebrahim then teamed up with Todd Montgomery to win the 2002 DFS Micronesian Open Championships doubles title over Jeff Race and Peter Sinclair.

He also took home the men's open crown in the CIC Tennis Classic after beating Tim Quan in 2003.

In 2004, after a brief hiatus Ebrahim reaffirmed his dominance when he won the men's open title of the Toyota Tennis Tournament over Daniel Son.

Playing tennis came naturally for Ebrahim, as he has been enamored with the sport as a child.

"I started playing tennis at about 5 years old, taking lessons with a bunch of kids near where I live. We loved it so much that we would be on the court for hours every weekend."

Tennis took a backseat in his later years on the island, however, as Ebrahim tried nurturing a new passion, triathlon.

To this day Ebrahim swears that taking part in his first triathlon was the most unforgettable of his many sports experiences on island.

"The first Tagaman I did was probably the most memorable. It was my first ever triathlon and I had no idea what I was doing. I used an old mountain bike and made foot holds with old shoelaces on the pedals. I must have looked ridiculous, but getting through it felt good."

In 2010, Ebrahim entered his first Ironman and finishing that test of human endurance, he said, is the pinnacle of his achievement in sports.

"My biggest sports achievement isn't actually tennis related. I did my first Ironman in 2010, which was a big stretch for me. I am not a very talented triathlete so I had to dig deep to put in the training hours and get through the race. Tough, but worth every ounce of sweat!"

Ebrahim packed his bags and left Saipan in 2006 to take the plunge in China.

"I had an amazing few years on Saipan and it was very hard to leave. I miss loads of things—tennis, beach volleyball, the golf tournaments, sunset drinks on the beach, all the hikes/trails, and more."

After the CNMI, Ebrahim ended up rejoining Hyatt in a remote location, one he would call a cross between a hotel and Alcatraz.

"I got to be part of the hotel pre-opening team, which was great but tough. After that I have lived in Hong Kong, Singapore, the Maldives, Macau, and now in Thailand."

Currently, Ebrahim lives in Bangkok with his wife, Chris, and their 20-month-old son, Jonah. He travels back and forth to Hong Kong though, where the young couple maintains a business.

In 2011, Ebrahim returned to Saipan briefly for work but pines to someday sneak into the island for a quick vacation with his family.

"I am quietly confident this will happen in 2014. I miss my friends. I would most definitely try to see them first when I come and visit again. I will then take my wife and son to the beach to muck around and watch the sunset over an ice cold cocktail!"

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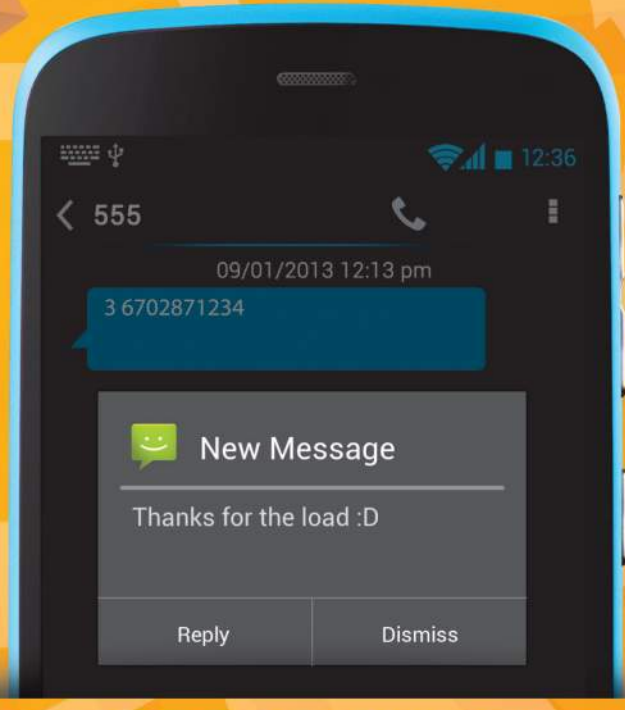

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